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PREFACE

The Rev. Dr. C. Scot Giles, a psychiatric chaplain and proprietor of the Wheaton Regional Office of Counseling Ministries, was the Psi Symposium lecturer at last June's UUA General Assembly in Indianapolis, Indiana. Over 100 people crowded into a modest size room to hear him speak about his work in "Hypnotic and Spiritual Healing in Contemporary Medical Care." Dr. Giles illustrated his lecture with some helpful slides which summarized the main points of his presentation. He was kind enough to present to our readers an extended summary of his lecture which he has retitled "Psychological and Spiritual Healing." Dr. Giles specializes in working with clients who have life-changing medical conditions and as part of his practice directs the first medically-approved program in America for the hypnotic treatment of cancer at the La Grange Memorial Hospital in Illinois. He has studied with Bernie Siegel, M.D. and has completed the Advanced Level Training offered by the Exceptional Cancer Patients Organization in New Haven, Connecticut. Scot Giles is a UU Community Minister, a Board Certified Chaplain and an Advanced Certified Hypnotherapist.

Last April the UU Psi Symposium hosted an all day conference at the First Parish in Needham, Massachusetts on "LIFE AFTER LIFE" which presented a variety of speakers and views about the afterlife. There were representatives from the Christian and Islamic traditions as well as from the Pagan and Theosophical traditions. The first speaker, The Rev. Dr. Judith Cressy presented a talk on "The Near Death Experience and Christian Concepts of the Afterlife" which we are pleased to be able to publish in this issue of the Journal. Dr. Cressy is the author of a recently published book *The Near-Death Experience: Mysticism Or Madness*. Dr. Cressy describes herself and her work in the field of Near-Death studies in the following terms:

In 1976 I had a near death-like experience. The following year I entered seminary, convinced that the spiritual impetus provided by such an experience constituted a call to ministry. Since then I have endeavored to build bridges between the spiritual worlds of the mystical traditions and the New Age, and the work of mainstream ministry. As an ordained American Baptist minister, I have done so first in the parish and lately in a hospice setting.

Though Christian churches appear to be in a period of conservative "backlash," I believe the Near-Death Experience and related spiritualities provide a window of growth opportunity for more liberal churches. I believe the near death experience provides the experiential dimension to "enliven old, death symbols." And such experience points toward the reality of a mystical MORE that many members of churches hunger for.

She goes on to say,

In the hospice setting, as well as the larger culture, the NDE provides a kind of proof of the Afterlife immune from Church dogma. Such glimpses of heaven help folks as they approach the final, often dreaded, destination of their life's journey. The NDE teaches that death, rather than the end, is a new beginning. Even though I am often marginalized by the mainstream for my involvement with the Near-Death Experience, I continue to lecture and teach where ever invited. I believe I have been called to broadcast this new "good news."

Dr. Cressy relates that she feels a special simpatico to Unitarian Universalists because of the openness of our tradition to new

experience and ideas.

The Rev. Carol Rosine, minister of the First Universalist Society in Franklin, Massachusetts was our keynote speaker and workshop leader during Psi week at Ferry Beach Park Association, Saco, Maine, this past July. Carol went out on a limb and shared some of the psychic and spiritual experiences which have impacted her and members of her family. Some of those experiences caused concern about mental health until she found help from those who could give reassurance that psychic experiences do not make one insane, but rather need to be understood from a wider metaphysical and spiritual perspective and integrated into a new sense of self with greater personal discipline and control. Celebrating and growing our spirituality, she concludes, "means becoming more whole so that we...can know more deeply and profoundly the ways in which we connect through time and space." With the permission of family and friends she shares the story of a profound and meaningful spiritual journey which we are pleased to publish in this issue of the Journal.

In Great Britain the counterpart organization to the UU Psi Symposium is called the Unitarian Society For Psychical Studies and was formed in 1965 four years before our group. They also publish a journal which is edited by Irene Hornby whom I had the pleasure of meeting during my sabbatical in England in 1992. The Winter 1995 issue had a most interesting article by the President of their organization, Frank Hytch, M.A., entitled, "The Supreme Adventure" which reflects on the evidence of life after death in the writings of British psychical researcher, Robert Crookal. It is a fine companion piece to the previous article.

The Rev. Joan R. Gelbein is Associate Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, Virginia where I happened to visit last winter. While there I picked up a copy of a sermon reprint "What

I Learned From The Celestine Prophecy And Other Coincidences" which Joan Gelbein had preached the previous November. James Redfield's New Age novel *The Celestine Prophecy* is still on the New York Times Bestseller list and has been for the past 136 plus weeks. Two years ago we published a tongue-in-cheek review of *The Celestine Prophecy* by The Rev. Webster Kitchell in dialogue with his power animal Coyote. This time we are pleased to publish a more serious review by The Rev. Joan Gelbein.

The final selection in this year's issue of the Journal is by Carolyn L. Vash, Ph.D. of Altadena, California. Her article on "The Underpinnings of Bioethics Opinions" is unique in two respects. First, it is written by a person who has had thirty-five years experience in the field of rehabilitation for those facing problems of disability and aging, and is herself a disabled wheelchair bound paralytic from polio at age 16. And secondly, she brings a philosophical/metaphysical/spiritual perspective to the controversial issue of abortion. In contrast to the philosophical materialism of modern science she presents a view of the Soul which evolves over the course of many lifetimes and has had many embodiments, and, therefore cannot be "killed" if a mother should choose to end her pregnancy prior to full term. A psychologist by training Dr. Vash has worked in both public and private sectors as a practitioner, researcher, administrator at middle and top management levels, has taught graduate university courses, and has published texts and professional books. Her most recent book, *Personality and Adversity: Psychospiritual Aspects of Rehabilitation*, focuses on psychological constructs salient to disability, using esoteric (i.e., psychologically interpreted) sacred writings and mythology.

Dr. Carolyn Vash is a new member of the UU Psi Symposium who says she is "delighted to know there are at least 400 UUs who are not made nervous by mysticism, esotericism, and related topics." She

looks forward to her continuing membership and we are pleased to be able to publish her very thoughtful article on bioethics with a metaphysical twist.

The Rev. RICHARD M. FEWKES
EDITOR

1996 UU PSI SYMPOSIUM GA LECTURE: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

by The Rev. Dr. C. Scot Giles, D. Min., BCC, AI

For the past six years I have been engaged in a full-time ministry of healing. I am a board certified chaplain in mental health, and a certified advanced hypnosis instructor with the National Guild of Hypnotists. Because of a personal medical condition I became interested in the use of the mind to aid the body in combating disease. This interest led me to study hypnosis during my 13-year parish ministry, and to study with physicians who were interested in mind-body medicine. When I received my credentials for the practice of hypnosis, several women with breast cancer asked if I would work with them to see what hypnosis might do to help manage their risk. I discussed this with their physicians and decided to give it a try. After some time, I developed hypnotic techniques that seemed to help, and all of the women did better medically than statistics said they should have. Fascinated, I began to work with other disease conditions and within a short time I had a Chicago-area reputation with the medical community as a hypnotist who knew how to work with physicians and who got surprising results. Within a year, a Chicago-area group practice of pastoral care and counseling asked me to join so that I could do this work full-time. I agreed, and made the switch from Parish to Community Ministry. That was five years ago. I now work with a full practice and direct the first medically-approved, hospital-based program in America for the hypnotic treatment of cancer at Columbia La Grange Memorial Hospital in Illinois. This lecture will tell you a bit about what I have discovered.

Historically, when someone in a medical environment spoke of

dealing with the "psychological" aspects of a patient's disease, they referred to what more technically was known as the "Psychosocial" aspects of the disease. Psychosocial therapy, typically done by Social Workers and Psychologists, concerned helping a patient manage his or her relationships so that any behaviors that hurt the health of the patient (such as alcohol or tobacco use) might be ended, and support structures (such as home health care) needed by the patient might be mobilized. To this day, every accredited hospital maintains a Department of Social Service that is charged with these tasks.

As the literature on how the mind affects the body has grown, it has become increasingly obvious that the goals of Psychosocial Therapy were too limited to really affect how the body functions. In 1986, a physician on the faculty of Yale Medical School, Bernard Siegel, M.D., published his best-selling book, *Love, Medicine and Miracles*, and founded the Exceptional Cancer Patients Organization. In his book, Dr. Bernie Siegel recounted his attempts to teach patients how to mobilize the power of their minds to actively participate in their healing from life-threatening diseases as a compliment to the conventional medical treatment they were receiving. He found that these patients almost always did better than those who received conventional treatment alone. Dr. Siegel had discovered his techniques by studying those patients who did not perish from diseases that typically claimed the lives of persons suffering from them—the 1% who did not die with a disease that was fatal 99% of the time.

As these ideas caught on, therapists attempted to find techniques that actually seemed to improve how well patients managed their diseases. When they did so they quickly found that the most effective techniques required the patient to reorganize parts of his or her personality. The patients with major illnesses who did the best medically tended to be those who used the illness as an opportunity to transform large areas of their lifestyle. Career changes, marital changes and values changes seemed common among the patients who

did the best. As it became apparent that those patients who carried a high disease burden got their "miracle" cure only if they underwent a process of personal and spiritual transformation at about the same time they received conventional medical treatment, therapy on this model completely exceeded the models used by Social Workers to see that patients managed well when they left the hospital. A new modality of healing work had been created.

I took up the work of psychological and spiritual healing just at the time when the techniques were first becoming known. I eventually would study with Dr. Siegel and go through the training program of the Exceptional Cancer Patients Organization he founded. The most challenging aspect of my work was to try to combine the techniques of medical hypnosis with those of Dr. Siegel. Fortunately, there was some precedent.

In 1985 a noted medical hypnotist, David Spiegel, M.D., had published in *The Lancet*, the Journal of the British Medical Association, a landmark study. Briefly, he divided approximately 100 women with breast cancer randomly into a treatment and a control group. Both groups received medical care appropriate to their disease at the same medical center. This was all that the control group received. The treatment group received, for one year, weekly group psychotherapy and instruction in hypnosis. At the end of ten years it was determined that the members of the treatment group had a survival rate that was double that of the control group. Later analysis showed that many members of the treatment group had used the time of the treatment to untangle relationships and to find new directions in their lives.

Encouraged by this and similar studies cited in the lecture, La Grange Memorial Hospital invited our company to create, under my direction, a program for the hypnotic treatment of cancer that physicians would prescribe for their patients in the same way that chemotherapy is prescribed. It should be clearly noted that the hypnotic work is always offered in addition to conventional medical

treatment, never instead of it. As this program developed, the theme of personal transformation became increasingly important. It began to seem almost as if there was a relationship between the experience of a good adjustment to a life-threatening disease and religious conversion, in that the patients who did the best used the diagnosis of the disease as motivation to change many aspects of their lives—not unlike the New Testament Saul falling off his donkey, converting to Christianity, and reinventing himself in the ninth chapter of the Book of Acts. On the basis of this observation I began to theorize that perhaps the whole enterprise of mind-body therapy had less to do with psychotherapy and more to do with spirituality and spiritual direction. This unique theme put my work at odds with many in the secular culture, although as the years have gone on and my program has continued to demonstrate results, there has been a welcome rapprochement between many of my secular colleagues and myself.

One of the principal things that convinced me that working with persons with life-changing illness (the term I eventually settled on in lieu of the more conventional, but negative, "life-threatening illness"), was that I noticed most of my secular colleagues undergoing a spiritual transformation as they did mind-body therapy. This transformation can be seen in the work of several high-profile professionals in the field of mind-body medicine: Herbert Benson, M.D., Joan Borysenko, Ph.D., Bernie Siegel, M.D., and M. Scott Peck, M.D. Simply stated, by the time each of these professionals got to writing their third or fourth book, they were doing spiritual direction, not psychotherapy, and their recommendations increasingly paralleled those we find in the literature of spiritual direction. I hypothesize that this transformation takes place because of the existential predicament the secular therapist finds him or herself in. Dealing with a major illness has a way of confronting people with the essential "questions" of life, such as "Why is this happening to me?" and "How can God be good if God permits this pain to happen?" I am told that the Rev. Dr. F. Forrester Church has written that "religion is the human response

to being alive and having to die." I would change that somewhat and say "Spirituality is the human response to being alive and knowing that you have to die." The questions that persons with life-changing illness ask are spiritual questions. Accordingly, I came to use the term "Psychospiritual Therapy" to distinguish this transformative therapeutic endeavor from standard Psychosocial Therapy, which I understand to be supportive in nature rather than transformative.

At the 1996 General Assembly UU Psi Symposium Lecture, I presented research data that indicates how hypnosis functions within the human body. While hypnosis was approved by the American Medical Association in 1958 as a valid healing modality, hypnosis in America has not enjoyed a good reputation, largely due to a distorted presentation of it by the popular media. I presented this material both for the sake of completeness and to illustrate a model of how human consciousness functions. Some of this material is identical to the material I present to students of hypnosis when teaching the Advanced Certification Curriculum of the National Guild of Hypnotists, portions of which I have written. This material, specifically the theory of neurological programming, the Self-System, and the non-dominant hemispheric processing of information by the brain, are original to my work. Other techniques are common among practitioners of hypnosis or psychotherapy.

To understand how a person doing Psychosocial Therapy uses the techniques described in this lecture to assist a patient with a life-changing disease one must first understand a theory of personality. Nerve cells in the human body consist of three major parts: the cell body which maintains the metabolic processes of the cell, the axon, a thread-like structure used to bring impulses into the cell and the dendrite, a branching, finger-like structure used to send impulses out of the cell. The axon of a cell extends into the area of the dendrite of the cell immediately below it. There is a space between the dendrite of one cell and the axon of the next highest cell in the chain of nerve cells that forms the nervous system. The space

is called the "synapse." When a nerve cell "fires," or transmits a signal, the nerve cell produces chemicals called "neuropeptides" from the dendrite area that flood the synapse. These chemicals are detected by the axon of the next cell in the neurological chain, causing it to fire. As it does so, it not only floods the synapse to the next cell with the neuropeptide that will cause the next cell to fire, it also produces other chemicals from its own axon that break down the chemicals of the nerve cell below it so as to turn "off" the signal that originally told it to fire.

In the human brain, the dendrite of any given cell intersects the axon of approximately 5000 other cells. While I do not maintain that the human mind consists only of the activity of the brain, all thought and feeling is accomplished through interlacing patterns of the firing of nerve cells in the human brain. The number of potential neurological interconnections in the human brain is finite, but enormous. Herbert Benson, M.D., of Harvard Medical School speculates that if a person were to hold in their hand a piece of typing paper for every possible interconnection of the neurons of the brain, a person would hold a stack of typing paper many light-years high. The human body must have some mechanism to organize this complexity. The method is variously known as neurologic hypersensitivity, neurological kindling, neurological potentiation or neurological programming. While each of these terms denote a theory that is slightly different from the others, all of these theories share a common theme which explains how information is retained and organized by the brain.

Many years ago it was believed that a nerve cell operated on the "all-or-none" principle. That is, it was either turned on, "firing," or turned off. However, more recent speculation suggests that nerve cells that we use a great deal to think frequently thought thoughts, or to feel frequently felt feelings, or to enact frequently enacted behaviors, tend to pick up and hold a slight electrical charge. The charge is not sufficient to cause the cell to fire, but cells that are

charged in this way (and are therefore said to be "kindled" or "potentiated") will fire on less stimulation than cells that are not. Therefore, nerve cells that we use a great deal to think frequently thought thoughts, or to feel frequently felt feelings, or to enact frequently enacted behaviors become over time quite stimulated and fire readily. In other words, frequently thought thoughts, frequently felt feelings, and frequently enacted behaviors "etch" themselves into the hardware of the brain, and it becomes easier to think those thoughts, feel those feelings and enact those behaviors than it is to think new thoughts, feel new feelings or enact new behaviors. This is the mechanism through which we acquire habits, learning, personality and all enduring psychological structures, which tend to become stronger over time as we repotentiate the neurological interconnections through repeated reinforcement.

Perhaps the most obvious place where neurological programming can be seen is in habit formation. Habits are "automatic" behaviors that we enact without needing to reflect on them. Habitual behaviors are not things that we "decide," rather, they are things that we simply "do." As an example, I do not stand in front of the bathroom mirror each morning and decide which side of my face to begin shaving. Surely, once upon a time I did make such a decision, but the memory of that decision has long since faded, and in fact I could not recall which side of my face I begin to shave consciously at all. I needed to imagine myself in front of the mirror and pantomime my morning routine to discover that I start on the right side. Yet this shaving behavior is one that I have faithfully enacted every morning for the last twenty-five years. This is true with all habitual behaviors.

When most people think about habit they imagine behaviors that are "bad" habits such as smoking tobacco or hair-pulling. However, much of human behavior and feeling is in fact determined by a kind of habit—habitual beliefs. Cognitive therapists such as Albert Ellis, Ph.D. remark about the "ABC logic" of thought and feeling. Every

complex behavior can be considered to have three aspects: the Activating Event, or environmental stimulus, the Beliefs held about that Activating Event, and the Consequent Behaviors. For example, when I was a younger man and another driver cut me off (the Activating Event), I may have held Beliefs (for example, that roadways were a place to demonstrate my masculinity) that would lead to specific Consequent Behaviors (chasing the other driver down and side-swiping his car). However, imagine this same sequence with a different belief system in place: the other driver cuts me off (the same Activating Event), I remark to myself how sad it is that so many people drive around demonstrating such hostility (a completely different Belief), and I simply touch my brake pedal and drive on (a completely different Consequent Behavior). As this example demonstrates, it is not so much the external world (the Activating Event) that determines what I do as it is how I interpret what happens in the external world (the Beliefs I have about it). Some of the beliefs I hold are the result of careful consideration. However, the vast majority of beliefs I hold are really little more than neurologically programmed reactions (for example, I apparently hold a belief that it is appropriate to start shaving on the right side of my face) based on assumptions I made long ago and have forgotten. All persons have many such habitual beliefs, including how to respond to stress, anger, pain, praise, illness, threat, intimacy and bereavement. It is the habitual beliefs of the latter sort that comprise the attitudes and behaviors that are relevant for Psychospiritual Therapy.

I work with a theory of personality called the "Self-System," which is operationally considered to be composed of three parts: the conscious mind, the unconscious mind and the subconscious mind. The "subconscious" mind I consider to be the sum total of all habits and habitual beliefs. The "conscious" mind is what most people consider to actually be themselves. It is the sum total of all deliberative thoughts and awareness. The purpose of the subconscious mind is to assist the conscious mind by sparing it the

chaos involved of having to make every decision or response as the result of a deliberative process of thinking. Such a process would be extraordinarily inefficient, and it is unlikely that any creature required to employ it would long survive. However, there is a third part of the mind in this model, the "unconscious" mind. The "unconscious" mind is that part of the mind of which the conscious mind is unaware, but which clearly engages in some sort of cerebration, or thinking. The unconscious mind, for example, is that part of the mind that gives rise to a dream that, on conscious examination, reveals new information to me about myself. The unconscious mind obviously engaged in some sort of cerebration in order to devise the insight, did so without the participation of my conscious mind, and as the insights were new, did so without relying on the store of habit and habitual beliefs from the subconscious mind.

While most people consider their conscious mind to be important, I take the view that it is the least important part of the Self System. The task of Psychospiritual Therapy is to listen to the unconscious mind, and use insights gained from that listening to reprogram the habitual behavior and beliefs that form the subconscious mind. The operational assumption that underlies my work is that the unconscious mind is the deepest, wisest part of the mind, and the part where the sources of spirituality are grounded. When I work with a patient, I assume that the unconscious mind of that person already knows what that person needs to do to be happy and healthy and whole, and is struggling to inform the conscious mind of what that is. Unfortunately, the unconscious mind does not possess words. Verbal functioning is part of the conscious process. Therefore, the unconscious mind must use the only language available to it—the language of feeling, mood, metaphor, dream, trance and image. All of these expressions are readily explored using the hypnotic arts and sciences.

As the unconscious mind attempts to communicate its awareness of what a person needs to do to be happy, it tends to escalate or step

up demands that it be heeded if the conscious mind of the patient refuses to attend to it. Initially, mood becomes problematic. If neglected, the unconscious mind begins to affect behavior so that others in the environment will begin to comment that "all is not right" with the patient. Eventually, mental illness may develop. Many persons somatize; that is, their body begins to give expression to the dynamics of the Self-System and at this level the disease of the patient can almost be understood as a metaphor for the unconscious struggles of the patient.

While I do not contend that psychological or spiritual forces play a causal role in the onset of disease (although once disease is manifest, research shows that state-of-mind is important in predicting outcome), I have noticed that there is a level at which the patient's disease does seem to reflect their mental or spiritual state. Thus, cancer patients tend to be persons who struggle with boundary issues, heart patients tend to be persons who struggle with issues of anger and betrayal (heartbreak), and diabetics tend to be persons who cannot allow themselves to taste life's sweetness in any way. However, I do not believe these associations are causal. Rather, they are useful heuristic devices that allow a patient to establish some sense of control over the disease condition. As they make efforts to deal with the psychological or spiritual issue, they feel empowered in their struggles with the disease, which, remarkably, seems to respond. Therefore, in Psychospiritual Therapy the cancer patient might be encouraged to set limits and boundaries on the demands others are permitted to make on them, while the heart patient might be encouraged to realistically clarify the convictions they have about how others are obligated to behave.

As the patient in Psychospiritual Therapy understands what it is that their unconscious mind is requesting, the focus of the therapy shifts to reprogramming the habitual beliefs and behaviors in the subconscious mind. Consequently, persons practicing Psychospiritual Therapy employ two classes of techniques: one set

is used for exploration so that the message from the unconscious mind can be discerned, while the other set is used to modify behavior. The task of discernment is a hermeneutical task that will be familiar to any educated religious professional and is identical to the skill needed to interpret texts or to provide spiritual counsel. The second set of skills approximate to those of other forms of secular psychotherapy.

In my work the principal tool used is that of hypnosis. As a hypnotist at the highest level of certification with the National Guild of Hypnotists, and a Diplomate of the National Association of Clergy Hypnotherapists, this is by far the methodology that I know best. By describing hypnotic techniques below, I do not intend to imply that there are no other methodologies that might be used for Psychospiritual Therapy.

Hypnotic processes deliberately subvert the conscious mind and deal as directly as possible with unconscious and subconscious structures. While hypnosis has been a union-regulated profession for more than 18 years, there are several non-union weekend training programs that claim to "certify" a person for the practice of hypnosis on the basis of a tiny amount of training. The poorly prepared hypnotists coming from such training programs are usually not able to help much and contribute to the public image of hypnosis as being a marginal technique. Additionally, many otherwise qualified professionals decide to engage in "guided imagery and relaxation" with little or no training, and proceed to accidentally do hypnosis instead without being aware of what they are doing. This had led to a number of cases where clients have been injured through unintentional hypnosis and sloppy, unintentional post-hypnotic suggestion.

However, studies repeatedly demonstrate the effectiveness of hypnosis as a helping tool. Brain research has demonstrated that there are physiological differences in the brain of a hypnotized person when compared with the brain of a nonhypnotized relaxed person. It

is a useful generalization to say that while the brain stores information holographically throughout itself, the processing of that information tends to be localized on one side (in one hemisphere) of the brain. Typically, the side of the brain that is active during normal waking awareness is called the "dominant" hemisphere (for most right-handed persons this is the left hemisphere), while the other side of the brain is called the "non-dominant" hemisphere.

The two sides of the brain are connected by a bundle of nerve fibers called the Corpus Callosum, which forms the "data path" for information to shuttle back and forth between the two hemispheres of the brain. During waking activity there is much activity in the Corpus Callosum. During relaxation, this activity simplifies. To use an analogy from Systems Theory, during relaxation the "noise" is removed from the Corpus Callosum. However, during hypnosis something more happens. The structure in the brain just below the Corpus Callosum is variously named, but commonly called the hippocampal cortex. It contains three organs that are implicated for hypnosis: the thymus, the hypothalamus and the hippocampus. Normally the activity of these three organs is uniform--they are all either active or passive at the same time. However, during hypnosis the thymus and the hypothalamus are active, while the hippocampus is passive. Indeed, individuals with brain lesions on the hippocampus are not hypnotizable, even if at one point, before the development of the lesions, they could be hypnotized. My theory is that when the state of unequal activity is produced in the hippocampal cortex, chemicals are produced that flood the Corpus Callosum, increasing its conductivity. To continue with the Systems analogy, hypnosis increases the "bandwidth" of the channel of information between the dominant and non-dominant sides of the brain. Frequently, a hypnotized person will recount experiencing themselves divided into two states of consciousness: an experiencing and an observing consciousness. This state, I believe, is actually a simultaneous awareness of the consciousness of the two hemispheres of the

subject's brain.

During the time of hypnosis, information can pass more readily between conscious, unconscious and subconscious processes. The hypnotized person can be led to "explore" imaginary rooms, chests, photo albums or other imagery that yields information and clues from the unconscious mind about what the unconscious mind is trying to communicate. Similarly, the hypnotized person can be encouraged to relax the potentiated neural interconnections that form the basis of all subconscious habit, and to use imagination to construct or "program" new and more adaptive habitual behaviors and beliefs. I have found that the best results are achieved using the more powerful forms of hypnosis that result from electronically enhancing the experience for the client, and I make use of a Bryan Electronic Automated Robot (BEAR) system of the sort originally developed by William Bryan, M.D., of the American Institute of Hypnotherapy. A BEAR is a stereophonic sound system, and a biofeedback system, interlinked by a computer. A complex computer-controlled sound experience is delivered to the client through headphones while the client reclines in a darkened room. The hypnotist works from a control console and blends prerecorded music and suggestions with his or her live voice, all the while monitoring the biofeedback sensors that disclose how that client is doing with the hypnotic experience and modifying the experience fluidly as the client's body communicates what the unconscious mind needs to facilitate passage into deep trance.

Apart from hypnosis I have also found dream and drawing interpretation to be useful tools to listen to the unconscious mind. I employ for this purpose the techniques developed by Bernie Siegel, M.D., and taught by the Exceptional Cancer Patients Organization. I also make use of explicitly religious techniques that will be familiar to most religious professionals. Examples of these are reflective reading of portions of scripture to discover what parts "speak" to the client in a special way, prayer and chanting to help information pass

from the conscious to the unconscious mind, and meditative personal religious ritual (such as saying the rosary, celebrating home communion, reading the Liturgy of the Hours from a theologically appropriate Book of Hours).

I have found that these techniques all work together to create a therapeutic climate of self-transformation. As the patient learns to listen to his or her unconscious mind, and does the work to reprogram neural interconnections to acquire new behaviors, and habits of thought and feeling, the patient becomes happier. It is not difficult to prove that happier people live longer.

THE NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE AND CHRISTIAN CONCEPTS OF THE AFTERLIFE

by The Rev. Dr. Judith Cressy

Delivered at the UU Psi Symposium Conference, April 1996

Howard was in France when he had his near death experience, or NDE. He was leading a tour of art students when his duodenum ruptured. He was taken to a Paris hospital where he languished in the hall most of the day, and then spent the night. At last his pain became so great he let go into death. Howard didn't know he was dead. He arose from his bed and followed two men who beckoned him. As he followed them they became increasingly abusive, but, not knowing where he was, he had no choice but to continue. They brought him to their friends, a group of fiends who began to taunt, tease him and devour his flesh. In the midst of this agony, he heard a small voice in his chest say, "Pray." Howard sneered—what good would prayer be, and besides he didn't know any. Again, the voice said, "Pray," and Howard began to recite everything he could remember from childhood including the Pledge of Allegiance. Gradually, the demons withdrew, leaving Howard torn, desolate, alone. At that point he felt so alone he would have welcomed the return of the demons. Again, he heard the voice and with all the strength left in him, he shouted, "Jesus, save me." As he looked up, he saw a great ball of light descending toward him. When it reached him, it enveloped him in a loving warmth which gradually healed and revitalized him. Then, together, they began to ascend. As Howard looked up, he saw what looked like a dense cluster of stars, and he knew that was where He, God, had his Abode. The light lifted him to a level below the dense cluster of stars, and soon he was surrounded by glorious light beings, of many colors indescribable

because there is no earthly equivalent. At that point he began a discussion with the beings of light. They told him, that despite his sense of unworthiness, he did belong there, that some day he would be a being of light like them, but he had a lot of work to do, best done if he returned to earth. They showed him his life, and in a life rich with achievements, the only place they paused to praise him, was one night when his sister had been in great pain, and he had held and comforted her. Howard has returned to earth, to learn to become more loving. He left his post as chair of the Art Department at a midwestern university, and is now a UCC minister.

Howard is not alone. He is one of approximately 12 million Americans who have died and returned to life with stories to tell about death and the other side. How do these compare with Christian concepts of heaven?

Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, authors of *HEAVEN: A HISTORY*, describe the alternation through Christian history of two principal images of heaven; theocentric and anthropocentric. The theocentric concept of heaven, introduced by Augustine, institutionalized by Aquinas and later the Reformers Luther and Calvin, consists of the imperium, empty except for the divine presence, and occasionally filled with light. In this heaven, the saved soul spends eternity glorifying God.

Human life of all sorts fills the anthropocentric heaven. In the middle ages the concept of the empty imperium found competition among the simple monks and friars who taught a different heaven—often based on personal vision—of a heavenly Jerusalem or a Pastoral heaven. Gradually, heaven became more populated. First, it was a meeting place of friends, family and lovers. McDannell and Lang discovered that the meeting-again theme was the single most consistent one throughout history. I find that true in my hospice work as well. I am a hospice chaplain, and I help the dying and their families discover and reflect upon their spiritual beliefs as they approach the final threshold of life. I find those who believe in an

afterlife, and these are usually Roman Catholics, have a simple belief that it will be a place where they will be united with their loved ones. These are the ones, I might add, who die most peacefully.

The picture of a populous heaven began in the Renaissance, with the reintroduction of classical ideas, continued through the Romantic period and began to blossom with the work of Emmanuel Swedenborg in the 17th century. This Swedish visionary described detailed heaven, and his descriptions formed the foundation of what Lang and McDannell call the modern heaven, a replica of earth life. This heaven was further fleshed out by the Spiritualists of the last century and the early part of this one. Christian clergy were caught up in the vision of the populous heaven, as well, and preached a heaven of continued progress which reflected their own vision of the ongoing progress of earth life.

The Christian heaven disappeared at mid-century, collapsing perhaps under its own weight, but surely under the impact of intellectual and scientific skepticism. Lulled to sleep by the implicit metaphysics of materialism, theologians, and particularly academic theologians were no longer able to believe. The list is legion—Tillich and Bultmann, who converted heaven to a set of symbolic concepts. Jonas, Hartshorne, and Griffin, who declared that heaven did not exist as Peter Hamilton had told us that God was dead.

The near-death experience has rushed in to fill this void. Millions of people have had their faith ignited or validated by hearing Ray Moody or Betty Eadie. They believe as I do, that this is a legitimate experience at least of the threshold of death, and something they can cling to for comfort. So far, academic theologians have given it short shrift.

There are, of course, important questions about the nature and reality of the experience, and I will introduce these later. There it is, though, this undeniable experience of something like what Christians have called heaven. How does it compare? Does it challenge Christian concepts or support them?

Like the Christian heavens described above, near-death heavens tend to be theocentric and in a limited way, anthropocentric. A rare few experiencers find themselves at the Light, and describe this being in terms that sound like God to me: A Being that is all Power, all Love and all Knowledge, their creator. I consider their experiences the most profound.

When merged with this Light, they are transformed in remarkable ways. They become healers, clairvoyants, love-filled servants of God. Their transformations and experiences are similar to some of the great mystics like Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Many great medieval mystics began their contemplative careers with a near-death experience.

Many more NDErs enter a heavenly realm. They find themselves in a city of splendor reminiscent of the heavenly Jerusalem in the book of Revelation. These are often cities of knowledge. Others find themselves in glorious paradisiacal realms, complete with heavenly music, spiritual beings floating about, gorgeous colored flowers, often accompanied by beloved family members or a spiritual teacher.

Nowhere, as Ray Moody pointed out in *LIFE AFTER LIFE* do we find pearly gates, St. Peter, or angels bearing harps. From this he draws the conclusion that his is no Christian heaven. Do we need precisely these images to say it's Christian?—especially when equivalents of these images are present in floating spiritual beings, heavenly music, a greeter and a boarder into and out of heaven? I think not, especially when the images of St. Peter, pearly gates and angels with harps is a cultural stereotype, and not found in a history of Christian concepts of heaven.

What then is a Christian heaven? If it is a place where Christ is to be found, then often it is. If heaven, however, is a place only for Christians, then the NDE contradicts that. People of all faiths find themselves in some sort of heaven after they die. It looks like the afterlife is nonsectarian.

Are there, though, requirements for entrance into heaven?—requirements that square with our Christian concepts of heavenly reward? I think so, despite Ken Rings' assertions that there is no morality in heaven.

One of my favorite experiencers, Tom Sawyer, returned with this advice, which many other NDErs support: learn to love, and give of yourself in service.

Tom went straight to the Light, but was sent back, presumably because he had more work to do to become pure enough to enter it. Tom says that the Light, the Light of Christ, is the Way into heaven. It makes you pure enough to enter the divine light, but it only makes up for unintentional sins. You have to work at "goodness" for your whole life, and then he makes up the rest. Howard also talks about forgiveness. The Light Beings told him that he was bound to make mistakes, but to seek forgiveness, and continue on. Tom, Howard and others know there is only one law in heaven: Love, and seem to echo Augustine's dictum, "Love and do what you will."

I believe the NDE not only reaffirms Christian concepts of heaven, but teaches us that God is alive and well, and that we are accountable for our actions. All of these seem to me like valid and vital Christian teachings.

There is another curious piece of Christian theology present in the NDE as well—millennial, apocalyptic expectations. Early Christians were convinced that the end of the world was imminent. Christ teaches it. Paul preaches it. They were watching and waiting. The early Church Father, Irenaeus' image of heaven was of a bodily resurrection on a renewed earth at the end of time. The period between personal death and the end of time was irrelevant, or at best sketchy. Luther and Calvin held to a millennial heaven, also, but disagreed on the nature of the interim period between personal death and the final Resurrection. One said the dead merely sleep, the other that there is awareness and progress while waiting for the millennium.

Contemporary sophisticated Christians are not only skeptical

concerning these apocalyptic speculations, they sneer at the mere mention. Groups like those in Montana don't help. Howard and others, though, heard God talk about the Apocalypse: His plans for the cleansing destruction of earth and a renewed one populated by people of Love and Peace. I find these stories intriguing and frightening. But Christian, very Christian. My faith finds a resting place in these experiences, but my mind refuses to be still. I need to ask whether these are real or not, and if so what do I mean by Real. Many years ago I, like most of my contemporaries, knew what was real: matter was real and I could access this reality through my five senses, and reflect upon that with my rational intelligence. I, too, was a child of Kant. Then I had a near-death-like experience and returned with the knowledge that Mind, not matter, was the building block of the Universe. Later I found this understanding of Reality in the mystical traditions of the world's religions (my own Sufi tradition for instance) as well as more common sources like Edgar Cayce who said, "Mind is the builder." It is this idea that has filtered into the New Age in the form of slogans such as, "We create our own reality," and the practice of affirmations. This understanding in the mystical traditions, however, is grounded in another Reality—the Mind of God. The New Age Consciousness movement, as well as esoteric studies, Christian and otherwise, touch on this Mind of Christ, or Cosmic Consciousness. God first thought the Universe, and it came into being; or God dreamed the Universe into being.

What I am describing here is another Reality—a higher Reality that has precedence over matter, indeed created it, and a Reality grounded in Subject rather than Object. Eastern philosophy has been dominated by the idea that Subject is more real than Object.

Now I don't mean to suggest that anything you think or experience is from God or constitutes a revelation, though at one level that is true. This point of view does suggest, however, that there are valid experiences of the Real which can be put to the test of discernment by placing them in the context of the mystical traditions

of the world's religions. The near-death experience fits there. It looks like the mystical experiences of many, in fact, Christian mystics. Recently, Sogyal Rinpoche, author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* has affirmed that as well. This is, he maintains, an experience of the other world, if only a threshold experience. If that is true, what a wonderful thing that is. In the midst of the darkness of materialism which has doubted and devalued the basis of religious belief—the reality of God, of heaven, and the necessity for morality, here is an experience of Light. For me it is a reaffirmation of my faith, though with a twist—It has led me to a larger, less sectarian concept of God. For others it may be merely the first chink in the armor of intellectual skepticism; an experience that causes them to question whether "This is all there is;" A seed planted in the Mind to hint at More to come.

CELEBRATING & GROWING OUR SPIRITUALITY

PSI Week at Ferry Beach

**The Rev. Carol Rosine
August 4, 1996**

When Dick called last winter to tell me the theme for this year's Psi Week and to ask if I would be willing to come and share some of my experiences with you, I was more than willing to say yes. Living deeply and reflecting on that experience has been part of my life for a long time now. In fact, Dick and I have been doing some of this together over the years. Dick and I first came to know each other through a class at Harvard led by a great spiritual teacher, Father Henri Nouwen, and for the last 7 or 8 years, we've been part of a small group of UU ministers who meet on a regular basis for prayer and spiritual practice. We've been witness to each other's struggles over the years, and occasionally we've even witnessed moments of clarity and deep wisdom.

Over the years that I've been intentional about growing my spirituality, I've explored a lot of different paths: I did TM back in the days when that was the thing to do; I've done Hatha Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Tai Chi; I've opened my chakras and smoothed my aura; I've chanted and Ohmed, whirled like a dervish and drummed under a full moon; I've explored my dreams and confronted my demons, read sacred scriptures and the work of great poets; I've walked in the woods weeping, and I've lifted my arms in Praise and Gratitude for the richness that is life itself. And as time has gone by, there have been learnings for me, some of which seem real and true to me. Learnings that are helping me shape my life as my life

continues to unfold. It is some of this that I want to share with you today.

I know that much of my spiritual exploring has been grounded in basic religious questions. Why am I here? Where did I come from? What am I to do while I'm here? How am I connected to other people and to nature and to the universe? Is there meaning to my life? What will happen when I die?

When I was a child this was all very clear and had been shaped by my Methodist understanding of scripture. There was a God who had created all that was and would be. He sat up on a cloud, taking care of us and loving us, but also watching to see if we were obeying his commandments. We were to worship him, praise him, follow the example set by his son, and if we were good, obedient, and faithful, we would receive our reward—an eternity in Heaven. Everything was carefully spelled out.

When that whole scenario fell apart as I grew older, I decided I was an atheist. Science was the thing. Logic. Rational constructs. Human potential. But there were questions that nagged. Especially the thing about death. Was this really all there was to life? Was this it? Dust to dust? Ashes to ashes? That was a scary thought for me. And it was this that led me initially to the book shelves at the local library where I first read about Edgar Cayce and then started right down the list until I'd read everything they had on psychic exploration and parapsychology. I was active in my UU church, but I also started attending a spiritualist church. It was about that time that this group was founded, and, of course, I signed up right away.

I was open to much of what I was hearing and reading but skeptical about other things and so, after a few years, I'd had enough. I lost interest. I decided to get on with my life. Eventually I ended up in theological school where for years I was centered more in my intellect than in my heart. Systematic Theology, Biblical Scholarship, and Christian Social Ethics, have a tendency to do that to people who are preparing for the ministry!

And then my son, David, started to see faces and hear voices that others didn't see or hear, and even claimed that he knew what people were thinking sometimes. His father and I thought he was psychotic, and so one horrible night we admitted him to a locked ward in a psychiatric hospital. He was 14 at the time. And when he got out, he'd learned that you don't talk about faces, voices, and experiences that others don't have. But he continued to see and hear and feel and believed he must be psychotic, And he was afraid. And alone. And then a teacher of his came to me to express his concern and tell me that David is psychically sensitive and can channel. The teacher knew this was so, because this is something he can do as well. When I asked David if this was true, that he was continuing to have these experiences, he admitted that he was. It seemed that once he had permission to tell what was happening, the flood gates opened and his psychic space filled up with all kinds of things. David was terrified and lost touch with the world that most of us inhabit.

He needed help, and Dick and some others in this group were the first ones I turned to. Eventually David learned to surround himself with white light, work with his spirit guide, Peter, and understand that his primary task at his stage in life was to go to school, play soccer, and hang out with friends. He's successfully completed three years of college now and is emerging into a sensitive, insightful man with a wicked sense of humor. We like each other a lot.

This experience with David has had a major impact on the growth of my spiritual understandings. On the Sunday following this crisis with David, I was scheduled to deliver a sermon entitled, "Is there Life After Death?." I had been doing research in typical UU fashion into what different faith traditions believed and the answers provided by science as well. But as I was working at my computer, I was well aware that all kinds of disembodied entities had filled my house and were clamoring for my son's attention. Was it real or was it a psychosis? I didn't know what to believe but it felt like the reality in which I'd lived for a number of years, a reality grounded in careful

intellectual constructs, was being shaken at the core.

It was Shuma Chakravarty, a minister at the Vedanta Center in Cohasset, who said, "Carol, you are a western woman having an eastern experience." From her grounding in Hinduism, she was able to help me understand that what was happening in my family would not be considered unusual in the world from which she came. Her understanding is that we are immortal souls who are embodied at different times in our journey so that we can learn and evolve.

As she worked with David, Shuma explained to me that there are different realities coexisting and that for most of us, we are only aware of the physical reality of our senses. She said it's as if there is a window separating us from the rest of what is. And that over this window, there are heavy drapes so that we can't see what's on the other side and nothing can come through. Some people, she said, catch glimpses of what is on the other side of that window. The poets. The mystics. And some people are able to see even more clearly. Even hear what's on the other side. And, she said, right then David, my beloved son, was standing in front of that window, and seeing and hearing what was on the other side.

The other experience that was most helpful for me during that time was learning that my colleague and friend, Elizabeth Tarbox, and her husband, Charles, had been involved in psychic exploration for decades. They'd been active in a Spiritualist Church in England and had continued working with an entity during their years here as well. The means of communication they used was similar to a Ouiji board only they had a round table with the letters of the alphabet in a circle around the edge. During our meetings with them, we'd put our fingers lightly on a small glass in the center of this circle and the glass would start to move. First in small circles and then it seemed that the glass took on a life of its own, was filled with energy and would move quickly from one letter to the next.

Elizabeth was the scribe, writing down the letters that the glass touched. Every once in a while we'd stop. It was as if whatever was

moving the glass needed time to rest, so we'd use that time to decipher what we'd received. The individual letters became words, the words became sentences, the sentences became paragraphs. We'd ask questions and answers would come. In full paragraphs. Pages and pages of answers. I'd never known anything like this could happen. And the communications that came confirmed what David's experience had been. David's guide, Peter, came through and told David how he could be helped and what he was to do.

These experiences in the Tarbox home were significant for me first of all because I knew and respected Elizabeth and Charles. I knew they weren't crackpots—weird people—and yet communicating with spirits, with disembodied entities was part of their lives. It seemed quite normal to them. Charles says he grew up in a family in which these kinds of things were accepted as normal, but his interest as an adult arose out of his curiosity about survival after death. He wondered whether there could be scientific proof for survival and over the years, with his reading, research, and volumes of channeled information, he is convinced that it is so.

I have become convinced that it is so as well and the impact of this deeper knowing on my spiritual journey has been profound. Within UUism we often talk about the way in which our religious beliefs will arise out of our experiences, out of the ways in which we encounter the world. These beliefs will often be informed by religious tradition and by the sacred texts that we encounter, however, unless these beliefs are grounded in our experience of life, they can too easily be blown asunder.

When my childhood faith fell apart as I grew older, I adopted a rational approach to reality. Reality consisted of the physical world, what could be touched, seen, or measured. I believed in human potential, that we could achieve whatever we wanted as long as we worked hard enough and wanted it enough. I really believed that we are in control of our lives. And then life started happening to me and it began to dawn on me as the years went by, that I'm not really in

charge here. Oh, to a certain extent I am. I can help shape my destiny. I can control the ways in which I respond to what comes into my life. But I often have no control over what comes to me. It is this that makes growing our spirituality such a challenge. Because for me, at least, it's not a done deal. It's a continuing, ever-evolving process. As life continues to unfold, I am constantly assessing and reassessing where I'm at and how I could be.

However, there are a few things that are grounding me and helping me to remain steadier than what I used to be. Shuma's explanation of our being immortal souls embodied in the here and now in order to learn is working for me as I move through life. Because of what happened in my own home with my own son and the knowledge and experience I gained in the process, I do believe that life continues when the physical body dies. I don't pretend to know the particularities of that, but I do believe it to be so.

Now the impact of that on my life has been to provide me with a bigger picture than I had before. When life happens to me, after I've wept in rage or grief, I am usually able to step back and wonder about the larger meaning of what's unfolding. How does it fit with my soul's journey through time and space.

In order to maintain that larger perspective, however, it has been important for me to have my act together as much as possible. So that I am clearer about what's happening, so that I can discern what's true and what's part of my own illusory concepts, so that I can be more honest with my self and with the people in my life, so that I can be more genuinely open to the world and life itself.

A year and a half ago, while I was on Sabbatical, I took part in an intensive program called the Hoffman Quadrinity Process. The quadrinity that's talked about is the four aspects of the self: the emotions, the intellect, the body, and the spirit. The intention of this program is to break the old destructive patterns from the past so that these four aspects of the self can be integrated into one whole, healthy person. For me, it was just the right thing, at just the right time, for

I really have experienced a profound change in my life. I was able to work with and through some things from my childhood that had set up road blocks in my spiritual growth.

What I've learned from this is that in order to move along the spiritual path, we need to have an understanding of the fullness of our beings. We need to exercise and open our minds, our intellects. Our bodies need to be well cared for and nurtured and loved. And our emotions, also, need to not only be experienced, but understood. Annie Dillard talks about finding our ways to the depths of our souls and that as we go deeper and deeper we will encounter monsters along the way. She says that what we must do is to recognize those monsters, tame them enough so that we can ride them all the way down. The Hoffman Quadrinity Process turned out to be the means for me to do just that. To recognize the monsters that had filled me with night terrors and to tame them and to ride them down to the depths of my soul.

These monsters don't stay tamed all the time. And they certainly don't go away. But at least I am able to recognize them a little more quickly and usually I'm able to get back on and tell them where to go. But it's not easy. It's not something that's done once and then it's over once and for all. And this is where the importance of spiritual practice comes in. Daily spiritual practice.

Along my spiritual path, I have come to know that the particularities of the life I experience now are part of my soul's journey. I have also come to know that it is this part of the journey that is to be my focus for now. How am I to live? How am I to live responsibly and with integrity? How am I to be in relationship to the people in my life? How am I to respond to the world and what are my responsibilities there? How can I become a more loving person, centered in the goodness that lies at the heart of life itself? How can I open myself more fully to the abundance of the universe, the extravagant abundance of the universe? How can I be centered in gratitude? In praise? In wonder and awe? How can joy, deep

abiding joy, fill my being?

It seems to me that growing and celebrating our spirituality means becoming more whole so that we as individuals can know more deeply and profoundly the ways in which we connect through time and space. It seems to me that when we know these connections, we will be able to rest more deeply in the embrace of goodness and love which is at the heart of it all.

THE SUPREME ADVENTURE

by Frank Hytch

There was a period in my middle teens when I developed and expressed views on a wide variety of questions, both in prose and in verse. I was even egotist enough to gather together some of these effusions in a short book, which has survived the years. On the subject of death I wrote: "What, then, is death like? I have no idea whatever. But it will be exceedingly interesting to find out, and the only way to find out is to die. Death should, therefore, be to some extent at any rate a welcome event. I am most curious to discover what happens in the land of the hereafter, and surely the adventurous spirit of many should impel him to look forward to, and certainly not fear, death."

Rather naive, you may think, and clearly written by someone for whom death in fact seemed an infinitely remote prospect; but I still retain strong traces of the kind of attitude I had then. But what about that assertion that the only way to find out what death is like is to die? Not so long afterwards I became aware that this is by no means the self-evident truth that I then, in my ignorance, supposed.

At the age of about seventeen I was taken on a number of occasions to the Sutton Spiritualist Church, where different mediums—the one I particularly remember being Estelle Roberts—gave clairvoyance and usually an address, sometimes in trance. On one of these occasions there was a message which seemed to be for me. This I identified, though I don't think a name was given, as coming from my elder cousin Roy. He was a navigator in Bomber Command, and had been shot down over Germany in the early part of the war. The war had not yet come to an end, and there appeared to be still some slight hope that he might be alive as a prisoner. I cannot recall what the message was: it was rather vague, as such

messages often are, but I took it at face value and it made quite an impression on me. It was subsequently confirmed that he had been killed.

For many years after that my interest in psychic matters was more or less dormant. It was revived, I think, partly by the death of my father and partly through contact with this Society. When my father died in 1970, after a long period of suffering, my mother, a firm believer in survival, very much wanted to get in touch with him. My thoughts naturally turned to Estelle Roberts, and we were able to arrange a private sitting with her. Some parts of that sitting certainly appeared genuine and to a degree evidential; others were more doubtful. Overall, it was not an entirely satisfactory occasion. It has to be said that Estelle Roberts, then living in semi-retirement in Bournemouth, was nearing the end of her own life on earth, and her psychic powers were perhaps somewhat impaired; but I have since found this rather mixed picture to be fairly typical of most clairvoyance. There are of course various reasons for this, which I don't intend to go into now.

What I want to consider this evening is how far we can learn anything from post-mortem communications about the nature of life beyond the grave. I suggest that we should begin by roughly distinguishing four different types of communication. There is first the type exemplified by the majority of clairvoyance. It consists largely of messages relating to people and events on earth, with only the vaguest indication of the state of being of the communicator. This kind of communication, at its best, can provide convincing evidence of individual survival as a basic fact, but it goes little further than that. Generally, such communications come from those who have not traveled far beyond death, and have not yet progressed beyond the lower realms of the hereafter.

Second, there are the spiritual teachings and reflections which form the subject of the address in spiritualist services, whether or not given in trance, and which sometimes form a part of other extended

messages. These do not in themselves provide evidence of survival and it seems to me that in general they take us no further than the most enlightened of the ideas and speculation we can achieve in our normal state of consciousness. In some areas, perhaps, they may give useful guidance: it is, for instance, almost invariably stated that the specific religious beliefs we hold on earth have little abiding significance or relevance. On the other hand, we look in vain for any further light on the nature of God, or the purpose of our lives, or whether there is reincarnation and, if so, under what conditions it occurs.

Third, there are attempted descriptions, sometimes quite detailed, of the nature of the world beyond death. Whole books have been produced consisting of such descriptions, for instance Jane Sherwood's "Post-Mortem Journal," purporting to come from Lawrence of Arabia, and Anthony Borgia's book "Life in the World Unseen." Most of these read like rather idealized accounts of a world characterized by the most pleasant and desirable features of life on earth, but without the pain and suffering. There are, however, a couple of different problems about them. One is that although, inevitably, they use our familiar language, the meaning must be different from that of the same words when applied to conditions on earth, since they are by definition not describing a material world. We have no way of knowing how great that difference is. The other problem is this: There is, it is widely agreed, a subjective element in post-mortem experience. To some extent, and perhaps to an increasing extent as we progress, our environment is molded and determined by thought. To what extent this happens we are not able to tell. For this reason as well we cannot treat post-mortem descriptions as if they were equivalent to descriptions of, let us say, the Solomon Islands or the Swiss Alps.

But there is a fourth area of communication: those messages concerned with direct experience at and in the early stages following death. Robert Crookall devoted the later part of his life to a

systematic study and analysis of such communications, and to a comparison with near death and out of the body experiences. He went on to develop a coherent theory and interpretation of them. His book "The Supreme Adventure" came as a revelation as far as I was concerned. It is without doubt an important and seminal work, and I propose to spend the rest of my time this evening saying something about it.

First, I should perhaps say just a little about Crookall himself. Born in 1890, he graduated with first-class honors in Chemistry, Botany and Psychology. He joined the staff of the Geological survey of Great Britain, becoming Principal Geologist. His special interest was in coal measure plants: he wrote a comprehensive work entitled "Fossil Plants of the Carboniferous Rocks of Great Britain." In 1952 he resigned, to devote the rest of his life to psychical studies. He was particularly concerned with astral projection, on which he wrote several books, and more generally with post-mortem experience and communication.

Looking back, I find that I gave a talk to this Society at the 1977 Conference in Oxford about Crookall on astral projection. Subsequently, I arranged a series of sessions on psychic matters at Unitarian New Meeting in Birmingham. John Robbins, our distinguished Secretary for many years, spoke at the first, and Tim Whitby at the second, as she may possibly remember. At the third, I spoke about "The Supreme Adventure." My son Michael and my daughter Tessa listened with great interest on these occasions. A few months later, Michael had been killed in a motor-cycle accident, and not long after that we were receiving communications from him which included accounts of experiences very similar to those studied by Crookall.

I now turn to the book itself. Crookall initially expresses his conviction that "the survival of death (and the communication of survivors with mortals) is as well established as the theory of evolution." He examines accounts of experience at and after death

from a great variety of different sources and finds that, although there are considerable differences, there are certainly highly significant common elements. Most apparent contradictions can be explained by taking two factors into consideration. The first of these, and surely the more important, is the stage of spiritual development and the spiritual attitude of the individual at the time of death. The second is the manner of death: there are differences in particular between the experience of those who die naturally and those whose death is sudden and enforced, for instance in battle or as the result of accident.

The basic structure of "The Supreme Adventure" is as follows. First, Crookall gives a short summary of common elements of experience at and shortly after death. Second, he analyses these into forty-two itemized statements. Third—and this constitutes the bulk of the book—he scrutinizes and examines each of these statements, giving large numbers of illustrations from a great variety of sources, then considering the extent to which they are coherent and the extent to which their probability can be supported by other evidence. Finally, he reviews the evidence as a whole, suggests a theoretical framework, and draws some general conclusions.

There is clearly no way in which we are going to be able to plough through forty-two separate statements this evening. What I propose to do is to look at the seven major experiences or groups of experiences identified by Crookall; then to describe and consider his explanatory framework; and finally to offer a few comments.

The first of the experiences he describes as "the Call." A person who dies a natural death is said to send out a kind of "call" to friends and relatives who have gone before. This call sometimes consists of deliberate and conscious thoughts; sometimes (I suspect more often) it is instinctive and sub-conscious. Such thoughts are received telepathically. They are stronger when there has been a deep bond of affection between the living and the dead. One communicator said: "In this land we are much more sensitive than whilst on earth, and when thoughts are directed to us by mortals we have a call, and we

are practically always able to come in close contact with the person who is thinking of us." It is, however, stated that even where there is no call, because for example there is no strong link with someone on the other side or because of a strong contrary belief, all those who pass over are met by someone. This applies even in cases of sudden, enforced death.

The second experience, which normally occurs at or immediately after death, is so familiar that I do not intend to dwell on it. This is the rapid review of one's past life—a panoramic review, but impersonal and non-emotional in nature. There are innumerable statements referring to this, of which the following are examples. "One of the first things noticed is that, without mental effort, everything we have done comes before us as a present memory." "I saw clearer and clearer the events of my past life, in a long procession, before me." It is, of course, well-known that flashbacks of this kind frequently occur as part of a near-death experience—one of many parallels.

Thirdly, we come to the group of experiences associated with the shedding of the physical body. There is the sensation of being outside the body, and perhaps of rising and falling. Two typical statements are as follows: "I seemed to rise up out of my body and come down quietly on the floor. There seemed to be two of me, one on the bed and one beside the bed. My pain was gone." "I was dimly conscious of figures moving round the bed. Then I saw that I was not lying in the bed, but floating in the air a little above it. I saw the body stretched out straight. My first idea was that I might re-enter it, but all desire to do this soon left me—the tie was broken. Close to me was my father's father—he had been with me all through. I also saw my relatives still in earth life. I spoke to them, they took no notice."

Another very common experience is that of passing through a dark tunnel or passage. This also is something described both by those who have passed over and by those who have nearly died but have returned. Typical statements are: "I remember a curious

opening, as if one had passed through subterranean passages and found oneself near the mouth of a cave. The light was much stronger outside," and, from someone who came back: "I was hurried off at a great speed. Have you ever looked through a long tunnel and seen the tiny speck of light at the far end? Well, I found myself hurrying along just such a tunnel or passage."

There is, however, general agreement that the process of dying does not involve either pain or fear. On the contrary, once a person has set out on this journey, there is a marked reluctance to return to the physical body. I was not present when my father died, but my brother was. Until that time he had been highly skeptical in relation to psychical matters, but he witnessed my father's "double" (as Crookall would call it) rising from the physical body with a beatific smile, a smile of relief from all the pain and frustration he had suffered.

Another feature of the experience of shedding the physical body is often an expansion of consciousness. Communications relating to this have included the following: "A great darkness swooped down on me like a bird. Then there was relief, expansion, a sense of being freed from an intolerable weight. I came out into strange clearness, and could not believe that I had died." And another: "How does it feel to be dead? One can't explain because there's nothing in it. I simply felt free and light. My being seemed to have expanded."

Another aspect frequently mentioned is the severance of what appears to be a silver cord, referred to by Ecclesiastes in the following verses: "Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." According to Crookall, this silver cord is the connecting link between the spirit body and the physical body. The final severance of the cord means the irrevocable death of the body. A number of people claim to have witnessed this.

One account is as follows: "The physical body had entirely stopped its restless moving, and was oblivious to all reflexes: death seemed imminent. The pulsations of the cord had stopped. I looked at the various strands of the cord as they spread out, fan-like, at the base of the skull. Each strand snapped and curled back as would a taut wire if it was suddenly cut. A twin process of death and birth was about to ensue. The last connecting strand of the silver cord snapped and the spirit body was free."

There are a number of differences in the experience of those who suffer sudden enforced death, as a result for instance of war or accident. It has frequently been stated that they may not, for some time, realize that they have in fact passed over. They may be confused and bewildered, and may describe their environment as misty or foggy. They are not immediately met by discarnate relatives or friends, having had no opportunity to send out a telepathic call, although, as already mentioned, they are always met by somebody. It seems, however, that the differences are usually short-term rather than long-term, so I shall not dwell further on them.

The fourth experience identified by Crookall is "the sleep." The natural death of average people is followed by a definite period of sleep. The nature and duration of this sleep depends on a number of factors, as is particularly affected by the degree of mental alertness of the person concerned, by age, and by the amount of physical and mental suffering undergone. Those who die in old age after much suffering on the whole sleep most; the average is perhaps three or four days in terms of our time. One communication is as follows: "For a short time after death, the soul remains in a veil. It corresponds to the chrysalis. The soul eventually breaks through it like a butterfly." And another: "If the physical body is suddenly cast off, consciousness never seems to be lost. It is when the spirit has struggled and struggled to be free that rest is needed for a while." And yet I think there must be considerable variation between individuals: my son Michael, who died in an accident, told us: "I

slept and slept, because I had died so suddenly, and then I woke in this beautiful place."

The next experience, naturally enough, is the awakening. Often it is at first a partial awakening, and normally it is an awakening into what Crookall regards as intermediate conditions—I will say more about this later. Typical statements are as follows: "What impressed me most, after a period of rest, was the reality of all things. My body seemed as tangible as before the change—my senses were more acute. I saw running brooks, lakes, trees, grass and flowers. I took long deep breaths of wonderfully revitalizing air." And again: "There seemed to be a period of unconsciousness. Then I awoke. Death really is just a sleep and an awakening." Finally: "I seemed to pass into a peaceful sleep. I hear now that I must have slept for three or four days. When I woke completely, I felt so refreshed. I knew I was not on earth, not only because of the long-lost people around me again, but because of the brilliancy of the atmosphere."

The sixth experience distinguished by Crookall is the judgement, an experience envisaged in some form by most religions. It comes at a later stage than the panoramic review and differs from it essentially in that it is an emotional and responsible survey in which the effects of our actions on others are fully revealed. Here are three typical communications on this subject: "The events of one's past life come back into consciousness. Each incident brings with it the feelings not on oneself alone, but of all those others who were affected by the events." "The judgement consists in being able to see ourselves as we really are, and by no stretch of the imagination being able to avoid seeing it." And finally: "The events of the life just closed pass before the mind's eye. Causes and effects are correlated, successes and their results, failures and their out workings. This process of review is very important, for from it is distilled a certain wisdom, the fruitage of the life just closed." The implication is that this is not a judgement carried out by any higher power: it is essentially a self-judgement, from a position in which we are able to see much more clearly and

objectively what we have done in our life on earth and what its effects have been.

The seventh and last of these common experiences is described as the assignment. On the basis of the Judgement, each person 'goes to his own place.' There are a number of spheres, levels, planes, realms or conditions—the terminology is various. It is sometimes thought that there are seven, though there is no consensus about this. The soul is assigned to whichever of these is appropriate to the stage of spiritual development it has reached. However, there is no sharp division or unbridgeable gap between the different levels, and progress from one to another is always possible.

These, then, are the experiences with which Crookall is concerned. In this book, at least, he attempts to go no further. On the one hand, it becomes less and less possible to give any sort of meaningful description of experience in the higher realms: indeed, Crookall maintains that the highest realms are completely indescribable and that those who have attained such levels are no longer able to communicate with us. On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier, as the spirit ascends to higher levels, the environment becomes increasingly (though never completely) subjective, and to an increasing extent capable of being moulded by thought.

I now turn to an outline of the theoretical framework put forward by Crookall. He regards the human individual as comprising four elements, which he describes respectively as the physical body, the vehicle of vitality, the soul body and the spiritual body.

The physical body is self-explanatory. The vehicle of vitality is far from being so and rather a difficult concept. It is described as a semi-physical "magnetic field," intermediate in nature between the physical body and the soul body. It is not, strictly speaking, a body, and it is not an instrument of consciousness. It has the outer form of the physical body, but has nothing corresponding to its inner tissues or internal organs. It has two main functions. One is to receive the

vital energies that are collected, after the manner of a condenser, by the soul body, and to transmit them into the physical body. The other is to bear impressions or traces of events in the life of the person concerned. It is therefore a transmitter of vitality and a memory record. It is usually shed from the total double (which I will elaborate in a moment) relatively soon after death: it then disintegrates. If any part of the vehicle of vitality separates from the physical body during life, for example in out-of-the-body experience, the two remain linked by the silver cord to which I referred earlier. If that is severed, the physical body dies.

The soul body is semi-spiritual in nature. It has the form and outline of the physical body and, in addition, the two correspond cell for cell and tissue for tissue. It has what might be described as "sense organs," and is an instrument of consciousness. It is regarded as the primary body, of which the physical body is a condensation. It is more sensitive and responsive than the physical body: it receives impressions which are not detected by the physical body, including psychic impressions as in telepathy and precognition.

Finally, the spiritual body interpenetrates and extends beyond the soul body. It is not immersed in the physical body, which it transcends. It is concerned with the awareness of all that is good and beautiful and true, and receives inspirations and intuitions which sometimes, but by no means always, enter into normal consciousness. The level of consciousness related to the spiritual body, which may be called mystical, spiritual or cosmic consciousness, includes knowledge of our unity with the Supreme Being, with our fellows, and indeed with all living creatures.

On the death of the physical body, the so-called double, comprising the soul body and the vehicle of vitality, leaves it—in most cases, we are told, chiefly via the head. However, as long as the vehicle of vitality forms part of this after-death double it enshrouds the soul body and reduces consciousness to a lower level than that obtained during life on earth. Crookall uses the term Hades to

describe the environment which is experienced when in this state, a state between dreaming and waking. All spend some time in this condition, though for some it is no more than the equivalent of three or four days. Those who were less spiritually developed when on earth remain for longer in this environment: these are the so-called earth-bound spirits, who are generally responsible for the phenomena associated with haunting.

Usually, however, the vehicle of vitality is shed relatively soon after the death of the physical body, in what may be described as the second death, or from a different point of view as the second birth. This then leaves the soul body, and, of course, the spiritual body. The soul body, as already mentioned, is an instrument of consciousness at a higher level than is usual on earth. Crookall uses the term "Paradise conditions" to describe the environment experienced at this stage. Here, earthly time and space are transcended, though there is something analogous to each: a certain rhythm of mental operations corresponds to earthly time, while great differences in thought and feeling correspond to wide separation in space.

The final stage, which comes after the judgement has been undergone, is the shedding of the soul body, which may be regarded as the third birth. The environment which is then entered is referred to as the true heaven of Christianity. Crookall makes no attempt to describe it: he considers that, from our position, it is indescribable. He quotes from St. Paul: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

I should perhaps add that, in Crookall's view, the great majority of post-mortem communications come from those in Hades conditions, who have for the most part not passed long through death: thus any opinions they give are likely to have no more validity than those of people on earth. Some communications, however, do come from those in Paradise conditions, whose soul body is no longer enveiled by the vehicle of vitality. For such communication to be

possible at all, the vibrations of the individual concerned have to be considerably lowered, and those of the medium increased. There is no direct communication from those who have shed the soul body and are in the environment of heaven; but it may occasionally be possible for them to communicate indirectly through someone who is at the Paradise Level.

Crookall, then, believes that the nature of our environment and the kind of experience we have depends very much on our constitution at the time in terms of the elements which he has identified: the vehicle of vitality, the soul body and the spiritual body. Our progress in the world beyond death resembles in some respects the peeling of an onion. Alternatively, we may look upon it as a series of births. The shedding of the physical body is, in fact, very much like our own birth into this world, as the following quotation illustrates: "Just as the earthly midwife assists in the release of the newly-born body in physical birth, so discarnate souls often assist in the release from the physical body of the double. In each case there is a connecting cord which has to be severed, and in each case the cord has conducted vitality from the original body to the one which is born from it."

Essentially, death is seen in its various stages as a process of release from the restrictions and limitations inseparable from our lives in this earthly environment—restrictions which we may, however, in a very intermittent and fragmentary way transcend even in this life. As we pass through these stages we experience an expansion and refinement of consciousness, and we find opportunities for spiritual development towards a goal which is beyond our imagination.

I have now given a fairly short outline of the common experiences at and after death distinguished by Crookall, and of the theoretical framework within which the progress of the individual person in the realms beyond death takes place. I have, of necessity, had to leave out most of his examples, taken from communications derived from a great variety of sources, and much of his detailed

discussion and argument. I hope, however, that I have been able to convey some idea of the essentials of what he had to say in "The Supreme Adventure."

How then are we to assess his contribution? It is of the greatest importance, in my view, that he has identified a number of common experiences at and after death, in the sequence in which they can be expected to occur. His account of these experiences is supported by many communications, and the evidence is strengthened by the strong parallels to be found in out-of-the-body experience and, more especially, in near-death experience. Thus, he has thrown some light, though inevitably a limited amount, on the unseen realms that lie beyond death.

If we go on to ask for a clearer and fuller description of those realms, he does not provide it. Indeed, for reasons which I have mentioned earlier, it is unrealistic for us to expect a clear answer. In particular, we are not able to imagine what it would be like to live in a non-physical environment. Thus, although we can, with Crookall's help, discern certain common experiences in the life that lies ahead when we pass through the gateway, we cannot reliably go much further.

When we come to consider his neat and carefully worked out theoretical framework, I must confess to feeling somewhat skeptical. He distinguishes the second birth, when the vehicle of vitality is shed, and the third birth, when the soul body is also shed. The concept of the vehicle of vitality is itself a difficult one, and I am not sure that I can either completely grasp it or quite believe in it. More generally, though, I do wonder whether it is possible to draw a sharp distinction between the vehicle of vitality, the soul body and the spiritual body. Is it not at least as likely that we progress gradually through perhaps a much larger number of planes, or levels, or spheres, traveling by different routes and at different speeds until finally, we reach that unfathomable heaven, the totally inconceivable end of our journey?

There is, of course, another possibility, which receives no

mention in his book and for which his framework does not seem to provide: that the soul may return to earth, perhaps many times, to gain further experience and to learn further lessons which may only be possible in the conditions of this world. Presumably, in terms of Crookall's theory, if reincarnation were to occur, this would happen before the shedding of the soul body.

It is curious that, so far as my reading goes, there is comparatively little reference to reincarnation in post-mortem communications, and yet the evidence that it occurs sometimes, particularly from the memories of certain young children, has always appeared to me to be strong.

There remain many mysteries. Do any communications throw light on the nature of God? As far as I know, they do not: those who communicate seem to have no more knowledge of God than we do on earth. Partly this is because the majority of those in contact with us are little more advanced than we are; partly perhaps because the nature of God is incommunicable. Or, of course, there may be no God: but I have to say that, to me, a universe which includes immortal souls progressing towards a spiritual goal is inconceivable without God. Another profound mystery surrounds our birth into this world. Apart from Helen Wambach's book "Life before Life" which I discussed in an earlier address, this is an area largely unexplored, and indeed very difficult to explore; and again it is one on which no communications throw any light.

In terms of the experiences we can expect at and shortly after death, however, Crookall has advanced our understanding, if only to a limited degree; but even this is immensely valuable. He has clearly marked out a few early steps along the way. Beyond these, our vision becomes much less clear and our conjectures increasingly speculative. The final destiny of the human spirit, the end of our journey, remains totally beyond our grasp.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE CELESTINE PROPHECY AND OTHER COINCIDENCES

by The Rev. Joan R. Gelbein
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"In the rain forests of Peru, an ancient manuscript has been discovered. Within its pages are 9 key insights into life itself—insights each human being is predicted to grasp sequentially, one insight then another, as we move toward a completely spiritual culture on Earth." —Thus saith a blurb on the jacket of a book entitled *The Celestine Prophecy*. The book was what you might call a sleeper for about a year or so, until word of mouth eventually pushed it onto the *New York Times* Best Seller list.

It was a long time member of this church who pushed the book into my consciousness. She was a little mysterious in her manner. She urged me to read it, speaking in those evocative tones of someone on to an arcane discovery to be relished amongst those prepared to receive it.

I can see why this book was indeed a sleeper, moving along slowly, as one person told another. I'm not sure any of us would have plucked it off the bookseller's shelves if we didn't have someone, who had already sampled its essence, initiate us into the possibilities.

For one thing, it also says on the book jacket that it's "an adventure", which, to me, as I began the book, suggested Harrison Ford in his battered, brimmed hat dashing around dangerous Peruvian rain forests with sinister cartels in hot pursuit after that mysterious valuable manuscript. Well, it sort-of reads like that, but, if you're into Harrison Ford and adventure, an adventure this is not.

The ingredients are ostensibly there. Our "Harrison Ford" is the author, James Redfield, who, having entered a state of disenchantment and desire to change his life, hears about the missing manuscript, coincidentally, in an unexpected encounter with a friend he hasn't seen in ages. He finds the information so compelling that he hops a plane to Peru to begin his adventure. The ancient manuscript was said to have been found in the Celestine ruins in Peru.

The sinister fellows are Catholic priests and government officials who are seeking to repress all knowledge of the manuscript. They want to find and destroy the pieces of the manuscript that seem to have been broken off, Hansel and Gretel-like, to create a path for spiritual seekers.

There are dangers, there is some shoot-em-up stuff, hot pursuits, and prison, and there's a romantic interest. But, *real* adventure?—character development??—escapist fantasies??? NO—No—No! That's not at all what this is about.

It is a teaching text, in the tradition of the Buddhist teacher, or Jesus teaching through the use of parables. We, as readers, are students, seekers after spiritual guidance; and Redfield is teaching us through the use of, in this case, a thin story format. Our attention is best placed on the acquisition of the insights and not on the art of writing. It is hard for many of us to plow through a somewhat-wooden text to pluck out whatever sweet little treasures of authentic spiritual guidance there might be.

The book addresses mystical knowledge, so it is best remembered that the Nine Insights presented are derived mostly through our senses and our intuition. To "get" the insights, so to speak, our minds must be open to perceived truth, rather than a literal concrete and measurable truth. It is like softening your focus in order to see what is there a little differently.

I take this book in hand as a way to energize dialogue on the subject of spirituality. Now that this church has the Labyrinth—a unique and ancient spiritual tool for walking

meditation—I believe that thinking about this type of material helps to prepare us for the labyrinth or any other path we might choose for our own spiritual journeying and development.

I would suggest that if you have read or will read *The Celestine Prophecy*, that you follow it up with *The Celestine Prophecy: An Experiential Guide*. It was just published and it synthesizes and makes enormously useful, the material in the original book. It is also filled with good bibliographic suggestions for wider reading in the area of spirituality.

For me, the most captivating ideas in the book were the suggestions:

1. that all people you come into contact with, potentially have a message for you,
2. that coincidences and serendipities and synchronicities are more than random chance, and,
3. that if you do your work to clarify your current life questions, whatever they may be, you will then be remarkably able to receive answers from people and events you encounter everyday.

We'll get into that. Let me introduce you to the nine Insights. They are, of course, the main focus of the book, basically mystical in nature, with some having psychological underpinnings. What is seen by Redfield as the ultimate desirable end, that is, an evolution into pure spirit, I do not personally share or envision. But that doesn't matter. I think much of his material is good to chew on. Most of these ideas aren't new, but they're put together with their own twists, turns, and embellishments. It creates a new little package that takes us from infield to way out in left field; from East to West, and from auras to ethics.

The **First Insight** tells us that a spiritual awakening is now occurring in human culture. The author sees this happening because he believes that a growing mass of individuals are beginning to

experience their lives as a spiritual unfolding. And, this unfolding has, as a significant component, the recognition of the role that coincidence plays as a useful guidepost for decision making.

Coincidence here is seen as a mythic reality—an unexpected clue that appears to guide us effortlessly to an opportunity that we seek. The coincidental helps move our lives along. It is something the Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, called the archetype of "magical effect" and claimed that it was a universal trait in human beings. Jung was quite serious in his study of "meaningful coincidences."

Our life stories are sprinkled with the mysterious by-products of chance meetings, missed trains, ajar doors and overheard conversations, intuitive feelings that tell you to stay away from there or go there, suddenly thinking of someone who then happens to telephone, being drawn to someone for no apparent reason you can figure out, a meeting of eyes across a crowded room. Coincidence creates a point of convergence where life's mystery stares back at us, outside our logical expectations and experience. **This First Insight tells us to start becoming conscious of the reality of coincidences, and then to open ourselves to an awareness of their messages and meanings by exploring them seriously.**

In October, I co-led an Adult Education class here in the Church with Beverly Lawson, on the material in the two *Celestine Prophecy* books. In the first session, Bev asked the members of the class to pair up arbitrarily with someone sitting next to them and explore any coincidences in their being thrown together at that moment in time. The very best one was the pairing of one woman who worked at Blue Cross and Blue Shield in the Claims Department, together with another who, it turned out, was quite upset about the outcome of a claim she had recently submitted to Blue Cross and Blue Shield. She even had all her papers with her that evening in her brief case! Needless to say, after the class the two of them had a very productive conversation!

The **Second Insight** attempts to look back through time to see how our world view had evolved—from a medieval church-controlled spiritual security to a scientific realism that provided the kind of secular security that came from scientific explanation, measurement and predictability. Then we moved on to an awareness that the universe, instead of being materialistic, was an interwoven pattern of energy systems. What seems to be happening in the last few decades is the emergence of a greater spiritual awareness, among growing amounts of people, through a variety of social movements such as New Age, Feminism, Human Potential, Systems Theory, Eastern meditation, and revival of Earth-based religions and spirituality. Also in emergence are scientific discoveries that open up to us altogether new philosophical and theological implications for understanding meanings and realities. This new Spirituality and Mysticism is a cultural revival which perhaps reveals an intuitive connection, back to spirit and away from our preoccupation with competing, controlling and conquering.

This juncture in time is being seen as a period of cross-fertilization between the scientific advances in physics and telecommunications, and the emerging strains of spirituality, ecology, alternative healing, and psychology.

The **Third Insight** describes our new view of the universe as energy dynamic. ("Coincidence" is BIG WORD #1 in this book, and "Energy" is BIG WORD #2.) We no longer look around at the world and think of everything as composed only of material substance. We are coming to know the universe as a vast field of energy, a quantum world in which all phenomena are **interconnected and responsive**. The universe is pure energy, and we are a form of that energy.

We ourselves have access to the universal energy, being part of it, so that we can be co-creators with our thoughts. That idea makes sense if you think of all things being literally one, and, therefore, interconnected. Redfield's idea is that because all energy is

interconnected, it responds to our expectations.

He also believes that the easiest way to get closer to actually seeing the energy emitted by all living things is to cultivate, through meditation, an appreciation of beauty; beauty in another person, in nature.

If that weren't startling enough, to think we could develop an ability to actually see energy emanations,...and I admit to a healthy amount of skepticism here...another startling teaching in the book is Redfield's belief that information comes to us when we need it. This I am not skeptical about; I have experienced it time and time again. Redfield says that information is a constant stream, and our intention selects out what we need to know. Further, when we become aware of universal energy, we can ultimately engage its flow and become a co-creator with it.

The **Fourth Insight** talks about what Redfield sees as an all-to-common struggle for power, and how human beings compete for energy with each other. He tells us we learn early, and that mostly because of weak or insecure feelings, we choose to build ourselves up by securing energy from other people. From early on, we get into a variety of behavior patterns that are manipulative and controlling of family, friends and acquaintances. We want a sense of control and personal power.

If we can manipulate or dominate another's attention in this negative way, we sense a boost from the other's captured energy. The result is a "fix," we temporarily feel stronger, leaving the other weakened. The other person may fight back against this invasive drain and then you've got your basic power struggle. Redfield says that all conflict in the world stems from this battle over human energy.

Redfield's take on this basic of psychology is kind-of interesting. He's using another language to talk about addictive and dependent behaviors in relationships.

This reminds me of one of Vera's favorite expressions—and she does have some wonderful bon mots in her repertoire! I've heard this one a few times, when she would recount a story in which something of praise or appreciation was said to another. "Then" says Vera, "they begin to look like a *watered plant!*"

Can't you just imagine that appreciated person, looking like those freshly nourished leaves, picking themselves up out of a droop and stretching out with a radiance...? Isn't this a picture of just the opposite of how we feel when we're in a power-relationship with someone? Doesn't our spirit literally droop, and don't we feel depleted as if our life energy has been drawn from us?

The **Fifth Insight** speaks of a mystical experience of feeling deeply in connection with an energy source outside oneself. It is most likely achieved through meditation. The experience includes a lightness of body, vividness of perceptions, a sense of undeniable oneness and total security, and a constant background sensation of love. This is a state in which we no longer need energy taken from others. The mystical experience takes us out of the need for control. Linking with the universal source through our intuition can guide us into creative rather than controlling behavior.

As unpopular as the word "surrender" might be to Unitarian Universalists, Redfield sees surrender as the key that opens the door in this process of releasing ourselves from a life of what he calls "Control Dramas." If we have **faith** that we are one with, and a part of, a universal dynamic energy, then, it is possibly not a matter of surrender, but a "relaxing into" what is simply there for us already whether we are fully aware of it or not.

The **Sixth Insight** teaches us how we might become conscious of, and work to change, our personal ways of manipulating others out of their energy. In his book, Redfield describes four so-called "Control Dramas": there are two aggressive types, the Intimidator

and the Interrogator, and two passive strategies found in the Aloof distancer and the Poor Me victim. The Control Dramas are repeated patterns with which we manipulate people or structure life events. If we don't become conscious of them and start to change the patterns, we won't be able to connect with the source of a healthier universal energy.

The Control Dramas, and some exercises to promote your awareness of them in yourself are nicely described in the *Experiential Guide*, which I recommend to you.

The **Seventh Insight** is my all-time favorite. It speaks of an awareness that coincidences, all along, have been leading each one of us on a path toward the pursuit of our life questions. **The trick to it all, as far as I can see it, is getting the questions right in the first place.** Redfield says that once you get the questions right, the answers always reveal themselves through mysterious opportunities. And those mysterious, synchronistic opportunities are found in coincidences, dreams, daydreams, intuitive thoughts, and most frequently, in the form of other people who bring us messages.

Frankly, I don't think this is so mysterious at all. Once your life questions are clear to you—even though it can be hard work to clarify them—then you are all the more open to picking up on choices for relationships and activities and directions. **The hard work of living is forming our questions about what we want and need, and where we want to go with our life.** It is also a continuing job to be aware of adapting, changing, and refining our questions as we go along. The question you had last year won't be quite the question you have today. And you can't always assume you probably know what all of your questions are. Most of us are vague about our directions and our needs, so we may probably have a thwarted longing or frustration about not getting what we're not sure we want anyway.

What I also like about this Seventh Insight is its recognition that there is a lot of useful intelligence in the intuitive side of each one of

us. I believe that is so. In our recent class, Bev and I noticed that as class members brought up more and more of their daily experiences with coincidences, and paid attention to their intuitive responses to people and events, they began to make all sorts of lively connections appropriate to what was going on in their lives. It wasn't magic. It seemed to actually be about as ordinary, and as automatic, as breathing.

The **Eight Insight** is a spiritual ethic. It says that because most synchronicity takes place through the messages brought to us by other people, then we must regard others, adults and children, as sources of energy and wisdom, and treat them with respect and caring.

When we take the time to really focus on another and listen to them, we give them positive energy, which in turn, can enhance their confidence and their ability to express themselves more fully. We get a message; they get life energy. What better synergy is there than this? Theologians, like Martin Buber, have written about this interaction in other language; they tell us that God is in the relationship.

You already knew there's a moral imperative to be respectful and pay attention to others. Well, this puts a new slant and incentive on it—you get a pay-back that is wonderfully selfish: you get a message from the universe, an answer to your question. Yes!

Who says it's better to give than to receive? Redfield says it's best to give **and** to receive, and the more you know about how to make that work, the better it will be for all of us!

OK, now, here's the **Ninth Insight**, that loses me. It talks about how evolution will proceed if we live the other eight Insights. His vision is this: that technological means of survival will be fully automated as humans focus instead on synchronistic growth. That growth will move us into ever-higher energy states, ultimately transforming our bodies into spiritual form and uniting this dimension

of existence with the afterlife dimension.

Well, maybe...who knows, but I rather think he was getting hard-pressed to end his book and took such a leap that I'm sure not many of his readers made it over with him, unless they were there already.

To sum up the teachings,—in my own way, gleaning what is useful to me,—we are asked to think about the fact that our culture is experiencing a paradigm shift, and that each of us, as individuals, is beginning to be aware of specifically spiritual needs and directions in our lives.

We are now open to the possibility of mystical truths because of the implications of certain scientific discoveries, and the pervasive spread of Eastern philosophical wisdom. Those scientific discoveries have been revealing to us a universe of ubiquitous energy of which we are an intrinsic part. The implications of which speak to us of the possibility that each of us can intentionally affect and influence the giving and receiving of life energy.

We learn to look upon ourselves, others, and all of Nature, with respect and patience, open to receiving their message of wisdom for ourselves. We, in turn, hope to channel our own radiant life energy, full of its messages for others, as well.

We realize that we must do the hard work of clearing our past of manipulative, controlling behavior, so that we undo our addiction to taking other people's energy for ourselves. We must learn, through meditation, how to find our source for life-giving and nourishing energy from the universal store.

We must clarify our needs and directions by learning the right questions for our own lives.

Last, we must find the trust necessary to *lean* into a dynamic universe as an energy source, believing that answers to our questions are abundantly available through any and all of our relationships or meetings.

It is then through our own intelligence, concern, and good will...

that intuition can precipitate deeds;

that daydreams will grow into compassionate action in the world;

that belief in a resilient and providing universe will mitigate some of the fear, hopelessness, or despair we may feel about the problems in human society;

and

that a **balanced** spiritual and rational development will help to form our lives into ones of integrity, love, and effectiveness.

The Celestine Prophecy; An Adventure, by James Redfield, Warner Books, New York, 1993.

The Celestine Prophecy: An Experiential Guide, by James Redfield and Carol Adrienne, Warner Books, New York, 1995.

THE UNDERPINNINGS OF BIOETHICS OPINIONS

Carolyn L. Vash, Ph.D.

This article comprises the text of an invited address I delivered in 1992 plus a discussion of reactions to it which took me by surprise. The conference, titled "They Shoot Horses Don't They?", examined bioethics issues affecting people with disabilities. It was sponsored by a house of worship in response to requests from members of the congregation who have disabilities. Although I am not of the same faith as the conference sponsors, an invitation was extended to me because I am a rehabilitation specialist who has a severe disability. On rehabilitation services issues, I am often asked to represent provider-side and consumer-side viewpoints.

A planning meeting revealed that other speakers held firm, crystallized opinions. For example: they agree that abortion of fetuses destined to be born with disabilities is not to be tolerated, and the discussion centered upon how to prevent such use of amniocentesis findings. The scenario was similar on the topic of assisted suicide. Since I was not so sure yet, I took as my assignment the task of mining beneath opinions to better understand the substrates from which they arise. I thought if we took the time to understand where our opinions come from we might grow more tolerant of differing views.

Opinions may be tied to early programming in the family, church, and school, to adventitious personal experiences, to the gradual accrual of (unprovable) assumptions, to unconsciously-adopted values, and to dominating emotions that silently shape our attitudes while we imagine we are formulating them intellectually. I decided to encourage non-defensive self examination by exposing

my own thought processes, even when it embarrassed me.

Text of Presentation

When I began planning what to say here tonight I discovered that I've not formulated such definite opinions on bioethics issues as my colleagues. I'm not claiming to be unopinionated; for example, I'm convinced that many persistent medical-ethics issues would simply disappear if health service delivery were less a profit-driven business and more a sacred calling. But I had to search among my metaphysical assumptions, philosophical values, and personality traits to find the substrates of thought and feeling that shape the opinions I hold.

If you wonder whether such variables really influence social opinions, read *Religion on Capitol Hill* by Benson and Williams (1982). It describes an intensive interview survey of 98 members of Congress. Knowledge of members' denominational affiliations had no predictive value. But knowledge of their positions on eight religious themes and six religious types allowed the researchers to predict how members would vote on congressional bills—virtually all of which reflect socio-politico-economic issues with ethical implications.

Short of well-formulated opinions, I have **attitudes**—emotionally-charged beliefs or assumptions that predispose me to behave in certain ways—which form the nucleus of opinions. ("Opinions" I see as attitudes that have been bulwarked with rationales or justifications and acquire increasing emotional voltage over time.) My socio-politico-economic attitudes are considered retrogressive by some disability-rights activists and downright dangerous by others. They say I leave our flanks exposed. Let's examine why.

When my **life task** involved working as a rehabilitation

administrator and recreating as a disability advocate, my opinions reflected the only realities I acknowledged—physical and social. Now, as my fifties fade and my life task involves working as a theoretician-writer and recreating as a philosopher, my interests have shifted away from how things ought to be in society. They are moving toward who and what we humans are, why we're here on planet Earth in bodies, and what might come next. These proclivities are simultaneously ancient and post-modern—in accord with ideas iterated for six millennia by prophets and sages and re-iterated by scientists and mathematicians.

Here's the main change. I've come to value the painful aspects of this temporary episode of biological life a great deal more, and to repudiate or complain about them a great deal less. The Creator produced me, Hitler, people too busy or scared to get involved, and a former boyfriend's mother who said people like me should be locked up in institutions so they can't make people's perfectly normal sons fall in love with them. I see my job now as grasping how that works and makes sense, not scolding the Creator for making a world inferior to the one I fancy I would have made.

Through the life task, one's **stage of life** influences attitudes that might inform bioethics opinions. Mindful of this, I conducted as non-defensive a self examination as possible, to expose potential sources of bias, resistance to change, reactivity to conflicting opinions, threat, vulnerability, and so forth, to lay on the table. Compared with most of the people with whom I talk about these matters, I'm older and far more self-consciously past the second stage of life (which, according to Hindu philosophy, involves establishing and maintaining one's place in the practical world) and into the third stage (involving the search for one's Self and God). I feel I've aged out of a social opinion on abortion. My attitude is, now that I'm past menopause, I've lost my franchise, so to speak. Let women of child-bearing age fight it out among themselves. I'll join the menfolks on the sidelines and wait to hear what the younger women decide. (I didn't say I have no

opinion on who gets to decide the abortion issue.)

Specific **life experiences or conditions** might make us intolerant of opposition on bioethics issues. My self examination unearthed no major trauma dramas, but one item arose that revealed a system of metaphysical beliefs of which I hadn't been consciously aware. I was an unwanted fetus who would have been aborted if it had been legal in 1934. I feel strongly that it would have been within Mother's rights to say, in essence, "No little soul, you don't get to use my tissues to build yourself a body. Go find someone else; your Daddy's an alcoholic, I want to leave him, and this is not a good time or place for you to get born." I'm glad it didn't turn out that way because by the time I was a baby she liked me and my life turned out to be terrific; but I do not feel that I had eminent-domain rights to the use of her body. Her soul got there first, and her life purpose, like mine, was about making choices—for better or worse—and experiencing the consequences. I remember reading that pregnant rabbits in overcrowded burrows reabsorb fetuses; and that among foxes, fetuses simply suspend development until environmental conditions improve. Eve ate that damned apple and we humans have had to make conscious choices, instead of having them made for us automatically, ever since.

Two **personality traits** that influence opinions on social issues are the extremes of a single dimension—the impulse toward freedom coupled with willingness to risk forfeiture of protection, and the reverse—a need for protection accompanied by willingness to sacrifice autonomy for security. This is where the mainstream of disability rights' activists and I diverge. They want protective laws that I don't want because they could limit my freedom. I'm willing to take my chances that someone might pull the plug on me prematurely because they can't comprehend how much fun you can have even though you're paralyzed. That feels better than guaranteed abridgement of my freedom to get help if I need it to opt out of life when I'm ready to move on.

An influential **personality pattern** may be the tendency to be extraverted versus introverted, and sensate versus intuitive. Extraverts get their psychic batteries charged by absorbing stimulation from other people, and they discharge them in solitude. Introverts gather energy in solitude and discharge it in the company of others. Sensate people rely heavily on data from outside (which comes in through their senses) whereas intuitive people rely more on ideas and insights that emerge from within. According to research (Kiersey and Bates, 1986), about 56% of Americans are sensate extraverts whereas only 6% are intuitive introverts. As a member of this tiny minority, it seems sensible not to expect to agree with majority opinions very often. However, I enjoy a good deal of agreement with other intuitive introverts.

Social-group paradigms may color opinions. Collectives share unstated assumptions and forget that they are assumptions, not facts. An example is philosophical materialism—the crucial metaphysical assumption arbitrarily adopted by the shapers of modern science for methodological purposes. The assertion "the physical is all there is" cannot be put to the empirical test. Other dimensions might exist, but our senses and all the devices invented to amplify their powers of discernment could not register any inputs other than physical. Still, people who fancy themselves rigorous thinkers fall into what Robert A. Wilson has dubbed "fundamentalist materialism"—taking literally what was never asserted as factual truth. Science has so dominated modern culture that people absorb its unprovable assumptions without realizing it. As one consequence, the comfortable confidence that once accompanied belief in a Soul that endures after the body dies gradually receded. Death became desperately repudiated and doctors, legislators, and judges are pressured to keep death at bay as long as possible. Any miserable life seems worth extending when total, irreversible annihilation is the only alternative imaginable.

Having mentally pared ourselves down from vital, immortal cogs in an Eternal Wheel of Life to expendable one-shot psychobiological

accidents may influence bioethics' opinions. If I thought "This is it!" I'd be protecting every nanosecond of life as an Earthling, too. But I believe in an eternal aspect here called "Soul." ('Believe in' means I find the construct useful in accounting for observed individual differences that otherwise seem unexplainable.) Embodied personalities may die after a few seconds of life or after a hundred years; either extreme represents mere moments in cosmic time. Souls are the part that keep on truckin' after absorbing the embodied personality's hard-won lessons. If Mother had wrenched me loose from the cells I'd managed to divert toward my body-building project, I suspect my thwarted Soul would have gone back into that dark night—raging or quiet—only to pop up later somewhere else for another try.

Attitudes are affected by our notions of the **purpose of life**. Mine look more like a conceptual swarm than a neatly itemized mission statement. They includes such ideas as learning lessons by making choices and living with the consequences, getting tested on whether I've "got it" yet, and being tempered—made strong and flexible—in the fiery furnace of adversity. My sacred Career path moves toward putting more love into the collective consciousness bank (my main job, I think); comprehending, to the best of my ability, how The Whole Thing operates (my hobby); and, sooner or later, feeling joyfully grateful for all of it—including the parts I hated while they were going on. This kind of life purpose doesn't lend itself to highly specific opinions about how other people ought to behave in particular situations.

My attitudes, personality traits and patterns, and metaphysical belief proclivities lead me to take risks with security that some perceive as foolish; to question whether the concept of rights has been reduced to absurdity; and to adopt a posture labeled "spiritual anarchy" (distinct from "political anarchy" for which the human species appears far too immature). I think we need fewer rules and ethical canons, and more willingness to start from scratch and think,

feel, sense, and intuit our way through the issues in each situation that demands decisions. Rules are the fast-law way; the more you have, the more specific they are, the less you have to think. Just place a legal template over a situation, turn it 'til it fits, more or less, and punch. So it doesn't quite fit; what's perfect? To me, it's perfect to be right some of the time and wrong some of the time after having applied the best wisdom and understanding available to totally customized decisions based on a minimum of general principles.

Reaction

The audience as a whole appeared to enjoy the presentation; the applause was substantial and rewarding. It was my fellow speakers who brought surprises. One made a comment—crafted with remarkably subtle skill—that communicated clearly yet inoffensively: "Be alert; this person is not of the faith that the rest of us share so her views are not of value to us." Another's comment was as lacking in finesse as the first had been artful. "Unlike Carolyn," he began, "I view life as precious." During refreshments, several women from the audience privately expressed appreciation for the views I shared on abortion. Then three male members of the clergy explained the error of these views. Another speaker squelched any urge he may have felt to neutralize my remarks and only said privately "Well, I can always count on you for viewpoints I might otherwise never hear."

The foregoing took place three years ago and I still don't have much in the way of opinions about what others should do on finding themselves unhappily pregnant or alive. But I have a somewhat better idea of what I'd do if I were pregnant. I'd make a valiant attempt in my meditation to commune with the Soul trying to build a body from my tissues. Maybe we could come to an understanding about each other's needs and purposes, negotiate a little. I'd try to assure myself that I wasn't creating unfinished business I'd hate to face later before making a unilateral decision to abort. I'm not much

clearer on what I'd do if I wanted to die other than try to meditate deeply enough to discern whether early check out would cause such a setback in my evolutionary progress that I'd be wiser to suffer until I could separate from the body I wanted to discard in a less violent way.

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